

Briefing

Ten questions elected members should be asking themselves about Supporting People

2011

1. Are you aware of the Supporting People services your local authority funds and who benefits from these services?

Local authorities have funded housing related support services in their localities using Supporting People funding from central government that began in 2003. These services transform people's lives, for example, enabling older people to live in their own homes for longer, helping people with learning disabilities and mental ill health live independent lives and assisting young people to make the transition from care. The exact pattern of services varies from one authority to another. Where does the money go in your authority?

Sitra has some helpful resources on Supporting People at www.sitra.org/supporting_people

2. Do you know if your authority has carried out analysis of the cost and benefits of housing related support services?

Supporting People saves money by reducing spending on other services, for example, residential care, homeless applications and hospital admissions. An independent Government evaluation estimated nationally it saved £3.4 billion for a £1.6 billion investment.

This cost benefit tool is also available to be used locally and some authorities have published their own analysis. Has yours?

The research into the financial benefits of the Supporting People programme can be found at <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100210162740/http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/financialbenefitsresearch>

3. Have you seen a copy of the Supporting People or other strategy that outlines the local priorities for providing housing related support services?

In order to make best use of limited resources, localities are advised to have a strategy that outlines how preventative housing related support services interface with other local authority strategies, for example, domestic abuse to best meet localities needs. Does your authority have a current strategy?

The Government's support for housing older and disadvantaged people can be found at www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingolderpeople

4. Do you know how your authority makes decisions on Supporting People services that are commissioned?

All local authorities differ in the mechanics on decision making and how services are eventually delivered to communities. The fact that the funding for these services is not distinguishable in the formula grant makes it essential that you understand what Cabinet member (or members) is/are responsible and how and where decisions are made regarding local spend on services for vulnerable people. What is the case in your authority?

Sitra's resource *Navigating the Maze* is a guide on engaging with and influencing local governance and commissioning structures. You can download a copy at www.sitra.org/navigating_the_maze

5. Are you aware whether data on housing related support needs is specifically included in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for your locality?

A Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) should provide a picture of your locality's health and wellbeing needs. This provides a good opportunity to establish need for support that enables people to live healthy, independent fulfilled lives and prevents or delays the need for more obtrusive and expensive services. But does the JSNA for your locality cover housing related support?

Sitra has collated resources on housing related support and JSNAs at www.sitra.org/jsna

6. What is your understanding of how your authority procures services and whether it is cost effective for the authority and the providers?

Some authorities put everything out to competitive tender as they believe it will save money or that procurement legislation means they have to. When you take into consideration the time both the authority and the bidders have to invest in preparing and dealing with tenders and the impact of TUPE rules it may in fact be inefficient and unnecessary. Is your authority making appropriate use of tendering?

To understand more about procurement law read the *Guide to Frequently Asked Questions on the Compact and procurement law* at www.navca.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/17B64DD4-88F1-4AD1-9B85-2FE2F1BA54EB/0/CompactandProcurementLawGuide_webversion.pdf

7. Do you know if a decision has been made to reduce funding for Supporting People services and if so how this was implemented?

Local authorities should be employing a strategic approach to manage the reduction in funding they received from central government for 2011-13. Blanket cuts to non-statutory services are likely to create disproportionate negative impacts on vulnerable people resulting in increased costs as more expensive statutory services are required. Has your authority carefully planned where and how to reduce spending?

Sitra has been part of a group of organisations who have prepared a fact and questions briefing for local authorities on Supporting. You can read it at www.sitra.org/fileadmin/sitra_user/2009/Policy/News/4_facts_4_questions_about_the_future_of_Supporting_People/Supporting_People_Services_4Facts_4Questions.pdf

8. Are you able to advise people in your locality what to do if they are not able to access the services they need?

Local authorities that are no longer able to provide a full range of Supporting People services should have a strategy that ensures that vulnerable people who rely on these services are not placed at risk. Cuts in services may impact on certain groups of people and local authorities should carry out an impact assessment on any decision to remove funding. Did your authority make a proper assessment of the impact of any cuts it has made to Supporting People services?

Local Government Improvement and Development have produced helpful guidance about equality impact assessments at www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=8017247

9. Do you know what Supporting People services your constituents want for themselves and their families and how their views have been taken into consideration?

Elected members should be using their local knowledge to make sure decisions reflect the priorities of local people, including vulnerable people and those who care for them. Local authorities often either have structures for administering Supporting People that enable “experts by experience” – people who use or have used services – to be involved in local decision making or fund user-led organisations to act as the voice for vulnerable groups. What is your authority’s approach?

Sitra’s *Navigating the Maze* (see question 4) identifies how experts by experience can inform service development. Read more at www.sitra.org/navigating_the_maze

10. Are you aware of the voluntary and community groups exist in your locality, and how much their work may be at risk due to reduction in funding?

Voluntary and community organisations are critical for thriving communities as they provide an important link between individuals and decision making structures. In many authorities, Supporting People funding is one of the biggest sources of income for these organisations. If their Supporting People funding is lost or reduced or their contracts are short term or insecure, many of their other, vital activities will be at risk. Does your authority have an overall approach to sustaining a healthy voluntary and community sector?

The Office for Civil Society part of the Cabinet Office has published *Better Together* to support local authorities preparing for local spending cuts to the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector. Read it at www.navca.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/A8502145-D5BB-4A5F-9BB8-B1550A4E03C3/0/Bettertogetherpreparingforlocalspendingcutstothevoluntarycommunityandsocialenterprise.pdf